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Symbol of the Realm

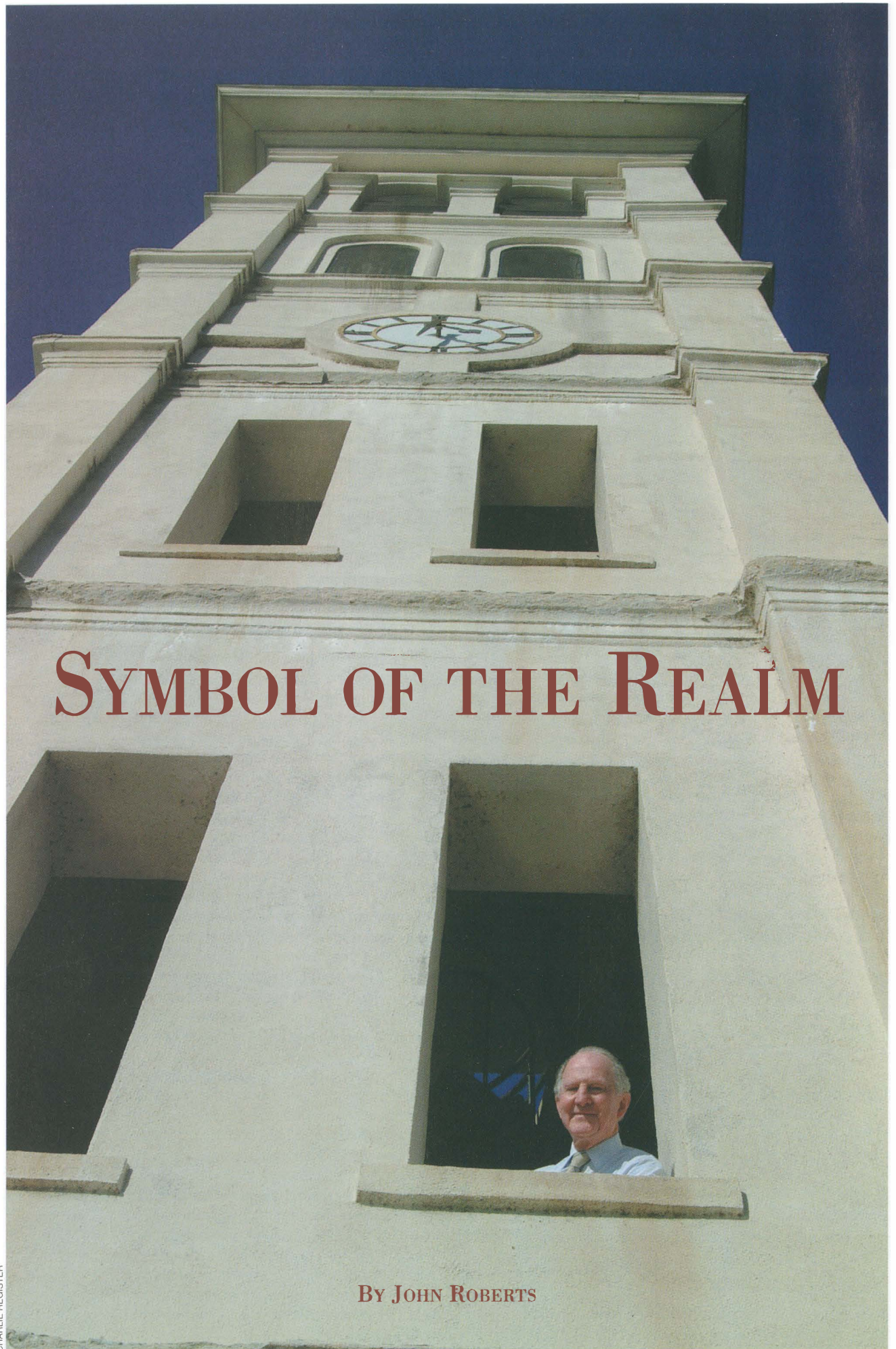
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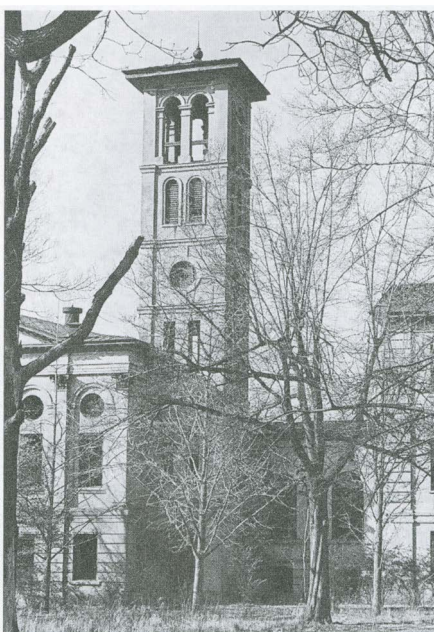
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SYMBOL OF THE REALM

BY JOHN ROBERTS

CHARLIE REGISTER



Because there were no blueprints from the mid-1850s, when Old Main (above) was built on the downtown campus, Carl Clawson (left), former director of physical planning and construction at Furman, spent a day at the abandoned campus in 1962 taking measurements — some from precarious positions — and making detailed drawings of the Bell Tower. His notes served as guidelines for construction of the current tower.

NOTHING SAYS FURMAN LIKE THE BELL TOWER, THE UNIVERSITY'S MOST DISTINCTIVE AND ENDURING LANDMARK.

Tape measure, pencil and notebook in hand, Carl Clawson climbed the steps of the Bell Tower on the downtown campus.

The year was 1962, and the men's campus had recently given way to a new, modern Furman on the outskirts of Greenville. The buildings were now empty and the grounds overgrown, but it would be a few years before the abandoned campus would first be hit by fire, then razed to make room for a shopping center.

Clawson, of course, could not predict what would happen to the old campus as he made his way to the top of Old Main (Richard Furman Hall) that day. Still, the engineer, who had joined the Furman staff in 1955, understood the gravity of his task.

"There were no blueprints of the original tower, so I kind of felt like I was doing my part to preserve history," he says.

He spent the day counting steps, examining construction material, leaning out windows and contorting himself in various ways to make detailed drawings and precise measurements of the tower, long the focal point of the campus.

Located on a hill overlooking the

Reedy River and the city of Greenville, the tower had been the best known symbol of the university since it was constructed in 1854. The bell in the tower had summoned some of the college's earliest students to classes and meals. In the early 1860s, a university custodian began tolling the bell to mark Confederate victories.

The celebratory tradition continued years later after the college launched its athletic program. On many occasions the sound of the bells echoed through town after Furman victories over Clemson, then the school's biggest rival.

The tower was also a favorite meeting place for Furman students — and, on occasion, was the target of good-natured pranks. The clapper was removed from the old bell several times; once it was even recovered from the Saluda River, presumably discarded by Clemson students on their way home from a night of revelry.

One morning in the early 1930s, after the bell had rung out news of a football victory over the rival "cow college," students awoke to find an actual cow standing on the tower's top floor.

"It was felt that this was a Clemson

Clockwise, from right: The Bell Tower, provided by the children of Alester Garden Furman in memory of their father, was built in 1965 after the peninsula on which it stands was expanded; Harry T. Van Bergen, whose foundry manufactured the carillon, returned to campus in 1984 to oversee repairs; the pathway that leads from the mainland to the tower, built using bricks from the downtown campus and Greenville Woman's College, will be refurbished as the "Anniversary Walk"; rust and mildew add an interesting perspective to the climb up the tower's spiral staircase.



FURMAN ARCHIVES

shenanigan," says George Christenberry '36, a former vice president at Furman. "We learned that a cow could be led up a stairway but not down. All types of equipment was necessary to lift the terrified animal out with a hoist and safely lower her to the ground."

The symbolism of the Bell Tower was so strong that university officials considered taking it apart and relocating it to the new campus. But the idea proved impractical.

However, as the new campus took shape, alumni were filled with a mixture of nostalgia for the old and pride in the new. And a movement sprouted to build a replica of the Bell Tower.

Clawson, who retired in 1983, says that at one time plans called for the construction of a "miniature" 55-foot version of the Bell Tower. But in 1964, the children of Alester Garden Furman, a longtime trustee and university supporter, donated funds in memory of their father for construction of an exact replica of the 88-foot tower — with Clawson's detailed notes providing the guidelines.

Still, the question remained: Where should the new tower be located?

According to Clawson, campus architects with Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, Kehoe and Dean originally proposed that the tower be constructed between the student center and dining hall on the site of what is now the Janie Earle Furman Rose Garden. But Clawson, then director of physical planning and construction, opposed the idea.



CHARLIE REGISTER



"I just felt that a Bell Tower should be a structure that you could see from the bottom up," he says.

And he had already chosen his own spot: a tiny peninsula beside the campus lake. At the time, this strip of land was just six feet wide.

Clawson envisioned the tower with a mountain backdrop, its reflection beaming off the lake. Ground lights would illuminate the tower in the evenings.

Plans also called for a carillon — one of the largest in the nation — to be housed in the tower. The sound of the bells would resonate off the surface of the water.

Clawson didn't have a hard time selling the idea. Soon after the peninsula was expanded in 1964, construction on the six-story tower began, and the university contracted with Harry T. Van Bergen of Greenwood, S.C., to manufacture the carillon.

Van Bergen, whose family operated a bell foundry in Holland, first came to the United States in 1939 to supervise the installation of two carillons at the New York World's Fair. At the event he met James C. Self, the president of Greenwood

Mills, who asked Van Bergen to install a carillon at Self Memorial Church in Greenwood.

The Dutchman, the eighth generation of his family to be involved in manufacturing carillons, took the job and later moved his family to Greenwood before the outbreak of World War II. He opened his own business and would eventually oversee the creation of carillons for Westminster Presbyterian Church in Greenville and for The Citadel, in addition to Furman.

In an article in the winter 1984 edition of *Furman Reports*, Van Bergen, who is now deceased, recounted how the size of the Furman carillon was determined: "Dr. [John] Plyler [then Furman's president] and I were discussing the carillon. Knowing I had installed the one at The Citadel, he asked, 'How many bells do they have?' When I told him 59, he said, 'We'll have 60.'" (Actually, the Bell Tower houses 61 bells if you include the rope-pulled bell that was moved from the old campus and placed in the tower.)

Van Bergen set to work on the bells, the largest of which measures five feet in diameter and weighs 4,500 pounds. Some of the larger bells were cast in the Van Bergen foundry in Holland. The carillon, which originally cost \$62,000, was installed

in the summer of 1966, a year after the Bell Tower was completed, and was dedicated in honor of John Edward Burnside, first chair of the Furman Advisory Council.

In 1984, Van Bergen was asked by Thomas Goldsmith, professor of physics emeritus, to come out of retirement and oversee repairs on the carillon. As a professor from 1966 to 1975 and after his retirement, Goldsmith had maintained an intense interest in the carillon and even done some minor repairs to the mechanism. But when it came to a major overhaul, he called on the expert to supervise the process.

Although the bells, cast from an alloy of 80 percent copper and 20 percent tin, are designed to last forever, the carillon, which can be played manually or electronically, requires periodic repair and restoration. That time has come once again.

Dust and spider webs have settled on the clavier — the "keyboard" by which the bells are played manually — and while the bells are still programmed to play "Westminster Chimes" every quarter-hour, the instrument, which once chimed out everything from Bach to rock at the hands of student carillonneurs, has not been played in years.

The tower's exterior is showing its age as well. A close inspection reveals chipped

areas, broken moldings and other problems caused by age and the elements.

The 80-year-old Clawson has for some time quietly lobbied the university to renovate the tower. Now, he's getting his wish.

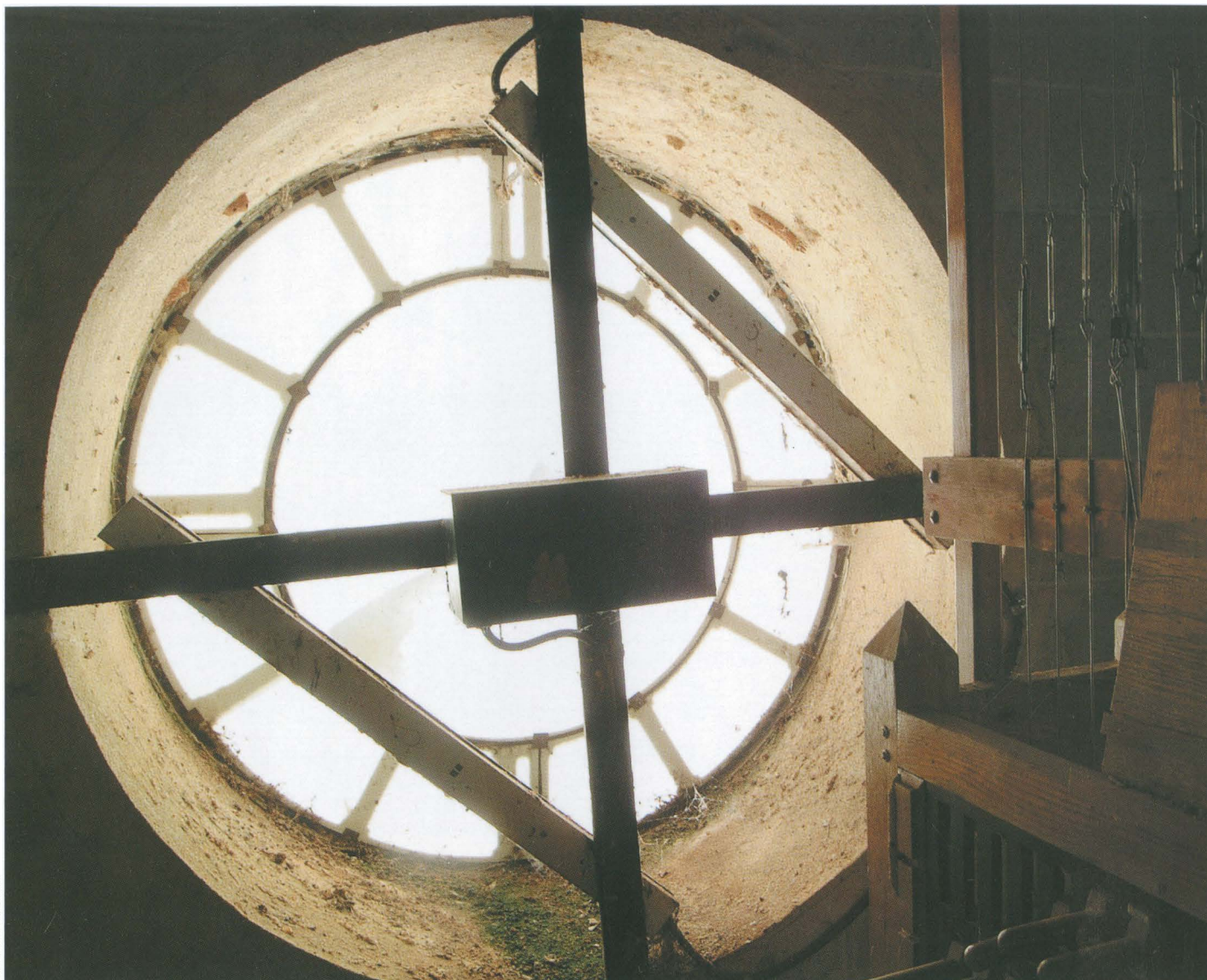
Furman has launched the Heart and Mind campaign, which links the restoration of the carillon and the Bell Tower with the library expansion and renovation. The funds raised for the Bell Tower will restore the carillon, repair the clock (which tells different times on different faces), refurbish the exterior and the brick walkway leading to the tower, and establish a maintenance endowment. (For more information, see page 30.)

A regular visitor to the lake and the Bell Tower, Clawson recently bounded up its iron stairway like a teen-ager and admired the bells as if he were seeing them for the first time.

"This is such a beautiful structure, and I'm glad that something is being done to keep it up," he said, looking out over the lake from the tower's fifth story. "I really love this space.

"It's been 28 years of my life." ●





BELL TOWER: FAST FACTS

■ The Bell Tower's copper roof was designed to be detachable. Engineers had to remove the top with a crane in 1966 to install the carillon.

■ At 88 feet, 1 inch, the Bell Tower measures to within one-sixteenth of an inch of the original. It stands 14 feet by 14 feet square.

■ The 60-bell carillon was placed in the tower to honor John Edward Burnside, first chair of the Furman Advisory Council. It can be played manually or electronically.

■ The carillon is controlled by a clock, which rings Westminster Chimes on the quarter hour and a large bell on the hour. The bells, cast at the Van Bergen foundries in Holland and Greenwood, S.C., range in size from 10 inches in diameter to five feet.

■ In 1909, McNeely & Company of West Troy, New York, cast the big bell in the tower that was part of the original Bell Tower. The original bell from the tower on the old campus disappeared after the Civil War.

■ Bricks taken from the old campus and Greenville Woman's College were used to construct the brick walkway at the tower's base.



Opposite: Discovered near the carillon, an old hymnal provides evidence of music that once echoed across campus. This page: After 37 years of standing tall against the elements, the tower's exterior is showing its age, and the clock currently tells different times on different faces. The "Heart and Mind" campaign will support the restoration of the tower and its components.